

District Test Scores on the Rise

By Tom Marshall

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In the drive to reach top 10 status, the Montgomery County School District has reached 29th among the state's 174 school districts based on a statewide assessment.

A three-year review of the district's scores shows that it has improved from 132nd in 2011 to 47th last year up to its current 29th placement. The 2012-2013 Unbridled Learning: College/Career Readiness for All School Report shows that the district as a whole scored in the 84th percentile based on school district calculations.

The report available online actually shows the score in the 87th percentile, but officials in the local school district say the figure is slightly different under their calculations than that provided by the state.

An explanation of the discrepancy appears later in this article.

The proficient calculation district wide was 62.2, up from 58.6 in 2012. That is the percentage of students scoring at the two highest levels, proficient or distinguished.

District scores are based on factors including achievement, gap, growth, college/career readiness and graduation rates, when applicable.

The district showed gains as a whole, but none greater than that at Camargo Elementary School, which ranked 50th out of 732 elementary schools across the state. That places the school in the top 7 percent statewide.

Improvement at Camargo has been dramatic over the past three years as it jumped from 528th of 714 schools in 2011 to 129th of 733 in 2012 to its current rating.

In 2011, Camargo was rated in the 26th percentile before improving to the 82nd last year.

The following are scores and designations for individual schools:

- Camargo Elementary—Score of 71.8, high performing school, top 7 percent of Kentucky elementary schools, up from the 82nd percentile in 2012.

Reading: 74.8

Math: 80.8

Science: 100

Language mechanics: 84.7

- Mapleton Elementary—Score of 74.3, proficient, top 26 percent, down from top 3 percent in 2012.

Reading: 66.0

Math: 70.9

Science: 100

Language mechanics: 76.4

- Mt. Sterling Elementary—65.7, proficient/progressing, top 22 percent, an improvement of 6 percent from previous year.

Reading: 64.6

Math: 62.0

Science: 97.2

Language mechanics: 83.8

- Montgomery County Intermediate—64.6, proficient/progressing, top 25 percent.

Reading: 69.1

Math: 75.3

Social studies: 93.8

Writing: 77.5

Language mechanics: 74.4

- McNabb Middle School—Score of 55.6, needs improvement/progressing; Focus school, bottom 47 percent, up from the 43rd percentile last year.

Reading: 64.7

Math: 58.5

Science: 89.4

Social studies: 82.6

Writing: 64.3

- Montgomery County High School—Score of 63.7, proficient; Focus school, 69th percentile, up from the 58th percentile last year.

Reading: 66.4

Math: 59.8

Science: 64.1

Social studies: 57.5

Writing: 69.1

Language mechanics: 66.7

Focus districts have what is described as a non-duplicated gap group (students with disabilities, free/reduced price meals and other minority students) score in the bottom 10 percent for all districts.

INSIDE The Numbers

Superintendent Josh Powell said the gains at Camargo Elementary are just what officials are hoping to accomplish district wide.

The school, which scored in the lowest 6 percent of Kentucky elementary schools in 2008, has quickly climbed the ladder to become one of the state's best.

Powell said the improvement is threefold—a change in expectations among staff, strong leadership and the adding of resources—to make the school a success. He credits principal Larry Dixon for allowing teachers to be empowered to make the changes the school needed to improve.

“Those people are just on fire about what's best for kids,” Powell said. “The culture and empowerment there has been the best in the school district.”

Despite the slip in scores at Mapleton, which achieved the district's highest score ever (in the top 3 percent last year), Powell reassured that the school is still performing well and expects the scores to rebound next year.

Scores were also high in the area of science.

Camargo scored a 100 in science while Mapleton scored 97.2, Mt. Sterling Elementary and McNabb, 89.4. The high school had the lowest science score of 64.1.

“We just have some incredibly high performing science teachers, which is something schools don’t normally do well,” Powell said.

While two schools—McNabb and MCHS—were deemed Focus schools, which might be an area for concern, Powell said he is confident the scores at those schools will improve and take them out of this category. Overall, Powell said the district appears to be improving at the level he expected and is well on its way to top 10 status.

He noted that of the 28 districts that scored above Montgomery County, 14 were independent school districts, which tend to have more resources, and three without high schools.

Even with their advantages, Powell said he sees no reason Montgomery County can’t create the same results with a continued concentration on student achievement.

But Powell cautions that the district must remain vigilant on improving.

“We can fall as fast as we dropped if we do not take the steps,” he said.

“We do not have the sustainability yet ... that’s why it’s even more of a reason to increase our emphasis and focus on student achievement.”

The latest scores, combined with the recent results of the TELL survey of staff, show the district is headed in the right direction, Powell said.

“I’m proud of our teachers,” he said. “I think I’m happier because I’m really big on the link between culture and working conditions and performance. I’m as happy with the improvement in working conditions as I am the test scores. And I’m very proud of our kids.”

DIFFERENT TALLIES

Powell issued the following statement to explain the difference in the district and state rankings:

“Although the district made substantial gains in every area, caution must be applied in the area of percentile rank. The state used the previous year’s percentile rank for this year’s scores. The true ranking

for the Montgomery County School District is 29th of 174 districts, which is the 84th percentile as opposed to the (87th) percentile being reported by the state.

“In Montgomery County, this ranking system did not represent a significant difference for most of our schools in the district, with the exception of the high school. Montgomery County High School scores were originally thought to be in the 87th percentile, but the information was misleading. The accurate percentile rank for the high school is 69th (72nd of 231 high schools).

“Additionally, the graduation rate was calculated much differently for all high schools in the state of Kentucky beginning with the last testing cycle. This recalculation was the reason for the majority of the increase in scores from the previous year, meaning that only a slight academic gain was observed at Montgomery County High School.

“The vision of the Montgomery County School District continues to focus on performing at the top 10 level and the transparency of scores is paramount when maintaining a genuine vision. Test scores (for us) are about doing what is right for children instructionally, and to indicate anything other than a precise measurement would reduce the great expectations set for this wonderful district.”